DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 068 075 HE 003 547

AUTHOR	Robinson, Lora H.
TITLE	Renovating the Freshman Year.
INSTITUTION	ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education, Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE	Dec 72
NOTE	4p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Publications Department, American Association for Higher Education, One Dupont Circle, Suite 780, Washington, D.C. 20036 (1 to 10 copies $.15 eacn; over 10 copies $.10 each)
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	*College Freshmen; College Students; Curriculum Development; Educational Change; Educational Improvement; *Freshmen; *Higher Education; *Student Adjustment; *Student Centered Curriculum

ABSTRACT

Students first entering college as freshmen often find that they are to have the largest classes, the least experienced teachers, and the most boring coursework. Thus, many students do not continue their educations past the freshman year, if they even finish that year. Changes, both in academic and nonacademic areas, need to be made on college and university campuses to improve the freshman experience. One higher education institution is now offering special guidance programs and facilities for freshmen students, and another offers a peer-tutor program in which all freshmen participate. Academic innovations taking place generally center around an interdisciplinary approach to introductory freshman courses, with emphasis on close student-faculty contact. Evaluation of such programs indicates that students are adjusting better to college life and that retention of students in later years is much greater. (HS)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

ERIC
HIGHER EDUCATION

Research Currents

ED 068075

RENOVATING THE FRESHMAN YEAR

by Lora H. Robinson

Educators' concerns about the freshman experience recently have become more visible. In the fall of 1971, the American Association for Higher Education sponsored a series of regional conferences in the midwest focusing on the topic "Justice for Freshmen." These well attended meetings provided a sounding board for those increasingly concerned with the nature and quality of freshmen educational experiences on campuses. This paper will summarize the nature of the concerns about freshmen, the proposed and extant types of changes affecting freshmen, and the efforts to evaluate changes that have already taken place. *Research in Education* (RIE) was the primary source for the programs outlined in this paper. There was no attempt to undertake a systematic survey of existing freshmen programs. Some additional materials did surface as a result of contacts with people directly engaged in the freshmen programs listed in RIE.

WHY THE FRESHMAN YEAR?

A good reason for starting institutional revision with the freshman year is that students begin college with high expectations or "the freshman dream," as they anticipate a stimulating, rigorous and challenging educational experience. Commentators on the freshman experience feel that colleges and universities can hardly be viewed as putting their "best foot forward" in meeting these expectations when their academic regime is in many cases much the same as high school; when courses are not much more demanding; when classes are large and impersonal; when the learned scholar and good teacher are invisible; when the variety of teaching-learning techniques offered is narrow (lectures only); when scheduling the standard course load becomes a juggling act; when the normal program consists of a series of unrelated courses; and when the educational goal for 4 years means meeting or beating the requirements.

In addition, there is the need to create a college environment suited to unique freshmen needs and problems. These would include problems of transition from high school to college, the problem of relating various academic studies to life and career goals, and the task of attracting freshmen students to intellectual life and scholarship. Although thorough renovation of the freshman year may be needed to reach freshmen more effectively, on many campuses this may not be possible. Therefore, the following discussion, while considering the freshman year from a broad perspective, will contain fairly specific suggestions that could be implemented.

PROPOSED CHANGES

Valuable ways to enhance a freshman program exist. They range from large-scale commitments, such as the creation of a special freshman counseling or advising team, to small-scale alternatives like a freshman class project. Additional suggestions from Marchese include: a freshman year publication; a freshmen office; an outside grant for the freshman program or a director's discretionary fund; a freshman dinner, trip or concert; a lecture series; or a faculty-freshman-class field day. Flournoy and Hobbs (1972) describe some unique ways specific institutions have provided freshmen with experiences similar to those already suggested. For example, at Berkshire Community College, all freshmen students are exposed to a weekly series of presentations on educational and cultural topics called the President's Hour. The two-credit course is coordinated by the college president and consists of film presentations, concerts, readings, lectures by the faculty and community people, and presidential poetry readings.

So far most items for enhancing the status of freshmen have dealt with nonacademic aspects. Marchese (1972b) also has a number of suggestions for revitalization from an academic vantage point. He proposes starting academic programs from the following proposition: given this student's background, ability, interests, and goals, what would be the most worthwhile way for him to spend a freshman year? Answers to this question are likely to lead to a number of changes. Introductory courses would probably be shortened and would stress what practitioners in the discipline actually do. More interesting subject matter would be introduced into courses. More varied academic patterns that set college courses apart from those of the high school might appear—for example, some courses

---

Lora H. Robinson is a research associate at the ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education.

Research Currents *is prepared by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education, The George Washington University, Washington, D.C., pursuant to a contract with the Office of Education, U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare. Points of view or opinions do not necessarily represent official Office of Education policy. Publication of the series is made possible by a grant from W.K. Kellogg Foundation. Copies of* Research Currents *may be ordered from the Publications Department, American Association for Higher Education, One Dupont Circle, Suite 780, Washington, D.C. 20036, at the following rates: 1 to 10 copies 15c each; over 10 copies 10c each. Payment must accompany all orders under $5.00.*

HE 003 547

PUBLISHED BY THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

> in which class members are compelled to work together as a team for the accomplishment of some concrete goal; some that get people off campus and into the field; some which demand high levels of initiative and independent effort; some which emphasize inquiry modes of reason, the ways of knowing; some of which are non-book in character, which have people paint, write, act, or play an instrument; and finally, some which break conventional work-for-the-grade patterns with use of pass-fail or learning contracts (Marchese, 1972b, p. 9).

Many of the best teachers would teach freshmen. Class size would vary to make certain that incoming students had a chance to participate in very small classes. Teachers would be more accessible to students, and there would be more opportunity for informal contacts. Also there might be more concern about both the location and aesthetics of learning sites.

ACTUAL CHANGES—NONACADEMIC

When reviewing materials for actual and probable ways to enhance the freshman experience, an attempt was made to consider only those changes designed to include (or which could include) all freshmen, and those designed to span at least the first year. This policy, in effect, eliminated orientation, honors, and programs for disadvantaged students. On the whole, there have been a number of changes on campuses that affect freshmen, but few have been widespread. The greatest breaks with tradition are found primarily with those institutions planning for or revising undergraduate education. Examples include Brown University-Pembroke College (Van Dyne, 1969; *Freedom to Learn*, 1969; and *Interim Report and Recommendations*, 1969); the Evergreen State College (Gehret, 1972; *The Evergreen State College Bulletin 1972-73; The Evergreen State College Catalog Supplement 1972-73*); Barat College (Marchese, 1972a); Rutgers University (Susman, 1968); Hampshire College (Bromell, 1971); and Oberlin College (*Preliminary Report of the Education Commission*, 1971; *Proposals of the Education Commission*, 1971). (See also those case studies in Ladd, 1970.)

Most small inroads toward changing the freshman year have been concerned with aspects of curriculum. Two sources which describe exceptions are Bloom (1971) and the *Basic Education and Enrichment Program* (1969) at Elizabeth City State College. Bloom reports on a pilot project designed to benefit those freshmen who volunteered to participate. The hope was that anticipatory guidance would provide preventive intervention, especially with respect to retention. Guidance was provided in two ways—topical articles were distributed dealing with such subjects as campus unrest and human sexuality, and summaries were prepared of the cohorts' responses to periodic questionnaires, such as "The First Month," that covered freshmen reactions to their university experiences. Bloom found that 1972 cohort members were overwhelmingly favorable in their reactions to the project, and that there was a statistically significant difference in the survival rate between cohorts and a comparison group. Data from "Cohort 74" is currently being analyzed.

Students at all levels now use the services offered by the Basic Education and Enrichment (BEE) program. Originally it was a peer-tutor counseling program in which all freshmen participated. Trained by instructors and under the guidance of counselors, the upperclass work-study tutors determined the total needs of freshmen tutees. General purposes of the program were to strengthen communicative and study skills; to strengthen adjustments to college; to provide academic and cultural enrichment; to alleviate academic deficiencies; to familiarize students with standardized tests; and to assist freshmen in meeting the academic demands of their classes. Although the BEE now serves a different constituency, it would be possible for other campuses to develop a peer-tutor program to help freshmen in ways similar to the BEE design.

ACTUAL CHANGES—ACADEMIC

Many innovations in the freshmen year are primarily curricular. Morstain (1972a, 1972b) describes a living-learning experiment at the University of California Davis. Those students who chose to participate in the Experimental Freshman Year program were housed in a coed dormitory along with their resident, upperdivision student leaders. The freshmen take one common course along with the rest of their academic program of regular university offerings. The 1971-72 theme was "Self in Society." Three professionals were responsible for the weekly multimedia, multiresource meetings. In addition students worked on independent study or joint projects within primary groups of 10 to 12 under a resident assistant.

Other innovations in the freshman curriculum parallel the UC Davis experiment with respect to the introductory, interdisciplinary course. They vary as to the sites taught (dorm or classroom), the type of course requirements (assigned readings, daily journals, portfolios, and projects), teaching styles (team teaching, individual responsible for small group, peers), student constituency (students, elective, representative freshmen, all freshmen), and type of course evaluation (no credit, conventional grades, grades self-assigned, pass/fail, grades/no credit, pass/no credit). For the most part, the intent of these academic experiences is to introduce students to intellectual study and thought processes through the exploration of topics that have direct bearing and immediacy to the student and his life. Campuses where such attempts were or are being made include: Beloit College (Marcuson, 1970); Bowling Green University "Little College" (Roller et. al., 1972); University of California/Berkeley (Tussman, 1969); Cornell College of Engineering (Berth and McConkey, 1972); Earlham College (Smith, 1968); Hofstra University New College (Hofeller and Dean, 1971); Mercer College, Miami University and Ohio University (Flournoy and Hobbs, 1972; Baasel, 1972); University of New Hampshire (Fried, 1970) and Wilmington College (Marcuson, 1970).

Two of the most ambitious freshman-year programs are the one initiated by the Institute for Services to Education (ISE) (Steif, 1970; Blake, 1972; Humphries, 1972; Parmeter, 1971; Turner, 1972) and the one at Hiram College (Morgan 1970, 1971). In 1967 the ISE began by implementing the Thirteen-College Curriculum Program (TCCP) at the member institutions of a 13 college consortium. The number of colleges participating in the program grew to 27 in 1971, and new ones will be added in the near future. Thus, the TCCP affects more freshmen than any of the other programs reviewed.

Rather than being interdisciplinary or only centering on one course, the TCCP focuses on new curricular materials and teaching techniques for freshmen in the areas of English, mathematics, social science, physical science and biology, and in the sophomore year humanities and philosophy. Students from the TCCP then proceed into the regular college program. New teaching styles evolved from the desire to reduce lecturing, increase student participation, and foster an inductive-study process. Curricular revisions were based

on the need for materials to relate to the experiences of the student. While the initial costs of instituting the TCCP at a given institution have been borne by grant funds, the goal of ISE is (1) for each institution to expand the program to include all freshmen and teachers and (2) to make the program integral.

Hiram College is continuing an interdisciplinary curriculum which began in the fall of 1969. The program is intended to foster the development of favorable freshmen attitudes toward education and to generally strengthen the freshman year of the college's program. Constituents of the program include the Freshman Institute, the Freshman Colloquium, and the Twentieth Century course. The Freshman Institute provides all freshmen, in groups of 13, with an orientation to college that includes intensive study of and practice in communication skills. On a credit/no credit basis, students engage in workshops, writing and speaking exercises, panel discussions, and movie making.

The Freshman Colloquium is designed to continue the students' close contact with a faculty member, the development of effective communication skills, and the cultivation of various intellectual skills. Faculty devise a variety of topics for the colloquia centered on one theme, but not overlapping introductory course material in the academic disciplines. Students participate in two colloquia in the first year on a credit/no-credit basis. The faculty member for the first colloquium serves as the student's academic adviser until the student selects a specific area of concentration. The Twentieth Century course is a year long examination of current issues from a historical perspective. The whole freshman class meets 3 or 4 times a week for faculty lectures, invited speakers, and films. In addition, smaller groups led by upperclassmen discuss issues raised at the meetings of the whole class, assigned readings, and students' papers.

EVALUATION OF CHANGES

Some colleges have evaluated changes made in the freshman year, e.g., Hiram College (Morgan, 1970, 1971b), the Thirteen-College Curriculum Program (Blake, 1972; Turner, 1972), Bowling Green University (Roller et al., 1972), Hofstra University New College (Hofeller and Dean, 1970), and the University of California/Davis (Morstain, 1972a). Unfortunately, none of the evaluative reports detailed the financial costs of the program. Since cost is an important consideration, it would be helpful to others if such analyses of innovative programs were to be made public. The evaluative efforts reviewed focused on the student. Dropout rate, grade-point average, student personality structures, students' perceptions of the college environment, students' educational attitudes, and student ratings of segments of their experiences were the means used to assess these educational experiments. Only Hiram College reported the administrative aspects of their program.

On the whole, the experiments have proven to be of value. For example, freshmen in an experimental course at Bowling Green University's Little College praised the course highly and believed it to be the best in their first quarter at the university. Furthermore, they dropped out of college at a much lower rate than a comparably sized group of freshmen, and reflected growth on the "Omnibus Personality Inventory" measure of intellectual development.

In other cases it is hard to separate the effects of the experiment from complicating factors such as initial student differences and the program's Hawthorne effect (somewhat similar to a halo effect). For example, Morstain compared the educational attitudes of students who chose the experimental program at UC Davis and those who did not at two points in time. In this case, although students in the experimental program changed more, and in perhaps more valued ways, it is difficult to determine whether the change is a result of the Hawthorne effect, the experimental program, or initial student differences. There is some indication that students valued the learning experiences in the experimental program more than those in their regular courses.

Both the evaluations of experiments at Hiram College and Hofstra University New College delved into students' ratings of different aspects of their experimental programs and found certain elements much better received by students than others. Hiram found two out of three parts of their new freshman curriculum received student satisfaction ratings superior to the regular freshman courses of the previous year (Morgan, 1970).

In addition to ratings of program components, Hiram College took a broader look at the program's impact. They studied the comparative effect of the new and old curriculum on general satisfaction ("Satisfaction with Hiram Scale", "College Student Questionnaire"), achievement ("College Board English Composition Exam"; "Survey of College Achievement"), and attitudes of students ("Omnibus Personality Inventory"; "College Student Questionnaire"). On the basis of these measures, Morgan (1971) found that with the new curriculum, "there was significantly less . . disillusionment and more satisfaction with almost all aspects of the College," that students achieved as well or better, and that students became "more liberal, socially concerned, and culturally sophisticated."

Efforts to evaluate the Thirteen College Curriculum Program have led to similarly impressive findings in its favor. Sixty-three percent of students from the experimental program entered their senior year, in contrast to 47% of comparable students in regular programs. There were also significant differences in cumulative grade-point averages (junior year) in favor of the new program. In addition TCCP students were more likely to have leadership roles in student organizations.

To explore differences between the TCCP and regular academic program, a questionnaire covering teaching practices, expected student behavior, course materials, and course content was administered to TCCP and control senior students. They were asked to rate how true each statement was with respect to their freshman, sophomore, and combined junior and senior year. Results of the questionnaire show clearly that TCCP students had totally different learning experiences than regular students in such areas as: teachers who experimented freely with new methods of teaching; teachers who did not rely on the lecture as the primary form of classroom instruction; conditions that encouraged students to develop their own viewpoints; courses relevant to contemporary issues and areas of student interest; consideration of individual differences in backgrounds; and demonstrated concern for problems of undergraduates (Turner, 1972).

On the whole, evaluative efforts have proven the merit of efforts to upgrade the freshman experience. The programs' effects have even reached well beyond the freshman year. Thus, it might be worthwhile for others to review institutional priorities in this light. Although new programs require money

and the current financial stringencies might be pressing. Marchese (1972b) has suggested two ways institutions might pay for programs within existing budgets. First, an institution might redistribute funds more equitably among the four years. Currently, freshman educational costs are much lower than those of the upper-division. Equalization of educational resources in terms of both money and manpower would support some very ambitious changes in the freshman year. Secondly, there is the possibility that providing a satisfying initial experience to students might ensure their return in significant enough numbers above past return rates to more than pay for a freshman year program. Regardless of the source of financial support, freshmen deserve programs and treatment from colleges and universities that will maximize their development as human beings. An institution that takes more than a passing interest in the quality of its educational environment for freshmen will be demonstrating that it takes the development of its students' potential seriously.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Baasel, William D. "Design of an Interdisciplinary Freshman Course." *Engineering Education* 62 (March 1972): 523-528.

Basic Education and Enrichment Program. Elizabeth City, North Carolina: Elizabeth City State College Office of the Coordinator, June 1969. ED 037 171. MF-$0.65, HC-$3.29.

Berth, Donald F. and Gladys J. McConkey. "Cornell's Freshman Minicourses: They Work." *Engineering Education* 62 (May 1972): 869-871.

Blake, Elias. *Graduating Seniors Look Back at their Freshman Year in College*. Washington, D.C.: Institute for Services to Education, April 1972. HE 003 438 (RIE Jan 73) MF-$0.65, HC-$3.29.

Bloom, Bernard L. *A University Freshman Preventive Intervention Program: Report of a Pilot Project*. Boulder: University of Colorado, 1971. ED 056 673. MF-$0.65, HC-$3.29.

Bromell, Henry. "The Great Experiment at Hampshire." *Change* 3 (November 1971): 47-51.

Flournoy, Don M. and Walter C. Hobbs. "Discovering Higher Education: A Source Book on Courses for Undergraduates." Mimeographed. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University, 1972.

Freedom to Learn: A New Curriculum for Brown and Pembroke. Providence, Rhode Island: Brown University-Pembroke College, 1969. ED 032 827. MF-$0.65, HC-$3.29.

Fried, Robby. *The Life Studies Program 1970-71*. Program Announcement. Durham, New Hampshire: University of New Hampshire, 1970. HE 003 369 (RIE Dec 72) MF-$0.65, HC-$3.29.

Gehret, Kenneth G. "Washington's Evergreen College." *Change* 4 (May 1972): 17-19.

Hofeller, Margaret A. and Marina L. Dean. *Curricular Evaluation: Student Attitudes Toward the First Course at New College, Fall 1970*. New College Report #1. Hempstead, New York: Hofstra University Center for the Study of Higher Education, October 1971. ED 056 676. MF-$0.65, HC-$3.29.

Humphries, Frederick S. *Institutional Methods for Developing Talent in Black College Students: The Thirteen-College Curriculum Program*. Washington, D.C.: Institute for Services to Education, [March 1972]. HE 003 437 (RIE Jan 73) MF-$0.65, HC-$3.29.

Interim Report and Recommendations. Report from the Special Committee on Educational Principles. Providence, Rhode Island: Brown University, April 1969. ED 032 861. MF-$0.65, HC-$3.29.

Karlen, Arno. "Antioch's First Year Program: The Hazards of Innovation." *Change* 1 (July-August 1969): 46-53.

Ladd, Dwight R. *Change in Educational Policy: Self-studies in Selected Colleges and Universities*. A general report prepared for the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1970.

Marchese, Theodore J. *Justice for Freshmen*. Opening presentation at six Midwest Regional Conferences sponsored by the Midwest Regional Council of the American Association for Higher Education, September-October 1971. HE 003 327 (RIE Nov 72) MF-$0.65, HC-$3.29.

Reexamining the Undergraduate Sequence of Studies. *Journal of Higher Education* 43 (February 1972a): 110-122.

Toward a More Effective Experience for Freshmen. Paper presented at the CASC Workshop on *Alternative Futures for Private Liberal Arts Colleges*. Spring Arbor, Michigan: Spring Arbor College, August 1972b. HE 003 326 (RIE Nov 72) MF-$0.65, HC-$3.29.

Marcuson, Lewis R. "Three Experiments in Interdisciplinary Education: A Study of Innovative Freshman Programs at Beloit, Hiram and Wilmington College." In appendices to *The Hiram College Freshman Year Program*, George A. Morgan. Hiram, Ohio: Hiram College, October 1970. ED 060 815. MF-$0.65, HC-$13.16.

Morgan, George A. *Course Projections and Staffing Needs for the New Hiram College Curriculum*. Hiram, Ohio: Hiram College, June 1971a. HE 003 452 (RIE Jan 73) MF-$0.65, HC-$3.29.

Evaluation of the Impact of a Student-Centered Freshman Year Program at a 'Typical' Liberal Arts College. Hiram, Ohio: Hiram College, November 1971b. ED 059 695. MF-$0.65, HC-$3.29.

The Hiram College Freshman Year Program. Final report to the National Endowment for the Humanities for Hiram College. Hiram, Ohio: Hiram College, October 1970. ED 060 815. MF-$0.65, HC-$13.16.

Morstain, Barry R. *Changes in Students' Educational Attitudes: A Case Study of an Experimental Living-Learning Program*. Newark, Delaware: University of Delaware, [1972a]. ED 063 885. MF-$0.65, HC-$3.29.

"The Importance of Student Interaction in the Freshman Year: Some Bases of an Experimental Living-Learning Program." *National Association of Student Personnel Administrators Journal* 9 (April 1972b): 283-287.

Parmeter, J. Thomas. *Thirteen-College Curriculum Program*. Washington, D.C.: Institute for Services to Education, [1971]. HE 003 429 (RIE Jan 73) MF-$0.65, HC-$3.29.

Preliminary Report of the Education Commission. Oberlin, Ohio: Oberlin College, September 1971. HE 003 453 (RIE Jan 73) MF-$0.65, HC-$3.29.

Proposals of the Education Commission. Oberlin, Ohio: Oberlin College, November 1971. HE 003 454 (RIE Jan 73) MF-$0.65, HC-$3.29.

Roller, David, Richard Giardina, George Herman, and Gary Woditsch. "The First Year of the First Little College." *Journal of Higher Education* 53 (May 1972): 337-360.

Smith, Daniel M. *Attitudes of College Freshmen in an Experimental Program*. Durham, New Hampshire: University of New Hampshire, November 1968. ED 043 293. MF $0.65, HC-$3.29.

Steif, William. "A New Curriculum for Blacks." *Change* 2 (November-December 1970): 19-22.

The Study of Education at Stanford: A Report to the University, Undergraduate Education 2. Stanford, California: Stanford University, November 1968. ED 032 845. MF-$0.65, HC-Not available from EDRS.

Susman, Warren I. *The Reconstruction of an American College: Some Proposals for Rutgers College*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University, The State University of New Jersey, October 1968, $1.00. ED 025 992. MF-$0.65, HC-$6.58.

Tussman, Joseph. *Experiment at Berkeley*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1969.

Turner, Joseph. *Toward More Active Learning*. Washington, D.C.: Institute for Services to Education, February 1972. HE 003 440 (RIE Jan 73) MF-$0.65, HC-$3.29.

Van Dyne, Larry. "The New Brown Curriculum." *Change* 1 (November-December 1969): 14-15.

To order documents in the bibliography identified by an ED number, write to ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS), P.O. Box Drawer O, Bethesda, Md. 20014. Documents with HE numbers are presently being processed by EDRS and will be assigned ED numbers upon publication in *Research in Education* (RIE). In ordering, ED numbers must be specified. MF indicates microfiche and HC denotes hard copy; payment must accompany orders of less than $10.00, and all orders must be in writing.